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THE BARNABITES



**Manual of history and spirituality
of the Order of Clerics Regular
of St. Paul Beheaded**

Chapter 11

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Anthony M. Zaccaria had presented Saint Paul and Fra Battista Carioni as “the one and the other Father” of the Order. Their influence was enormous in the life and the spirit of the Barnabite Congregation.

As the Order went through its first evolution toward a clarification and orientation of its organization, we come across another two saints whose life is intertwined with our domestic events: Charles Borromeo and Francis De Sales.

Charles Borromeo gave to the Congregation a stable and definitive legislation, and firmly established it in Lombardy. Francis de Sales opened to the Order new horizons, and guided it toward education as its peculiar, although not exclusive, apostolate.

They enriched the Order with salient aspects of their spirituality: pastoral zeal, which would make the Barnabites the helpers of the Bishops, and asceticism rooted in love, finesse of the spirit and manners, and that amiability proper of our spirituality.

These merits were promptly acknowledged by the Barnabites, who venerate in Charles Borromeo and in Francis de Sales two Patrons of the Order.

ST. CHARLES BORROMEO

(1538-1584)

Charles Borromeo was archbishop of Milan, Cardinal-Priest of the Title of St. Prassede, Papal Secretary of State under Pius IV, and one of the chief factors in the Catholic Counter-Reformation. His emblem was the word *humilitas* crowned, which is a portion of the Borromeo shield. He is usually represented in art in his cardinal's robes, barefoot, carrying the cross as archbishop; a rope round his neck, one hand raised in blessing, thus recalling his work during the plague.

Charles was born in Rocca d'Arona (Lake Maggiore) on October 2, 1538, the second son of Count Giberto Borromeo and Margherita de' Medici, sister of Pius IV. He was intended for the Church, and received the clerical tonsure and the title of the abbacy of San Gratiano when 12 years old. He was tutored at Milan by Francesco Alciati, and studied at the University of Pavia (1552-59), where he earned a doctorate *in utroque* (= Civil and Canon Law). Three weeks later (Dec. 25, 1559) Cardinal Gian Angelo de' Medici succeeded Paul V, taking the name of Pius IV. The new Pope called his young nephew to Rome and advanced him rapidly through a brilliant ecclesiastical career.

St. Charles and the Barnabites

The veneration of the Barnabites for St. Charles was such that only few months after his canonization (November 1610), they were the first to dedicate to his honor a church in Rome, St. Charles ai Catinari, which at the time was under construction.

The Barnabites came to know St. Charles personally for the first time on September 23, 1565, when he took possession of the archdiocese of Milan.

Our Fathers experienced the protection of the Saint right from the beginning: at the death of Amico Gritti, Canon of Novara, his nephew sent Apostolic Letters claiming the church of St. Barnabas. The Fathers did not trust those Letters, and the case was sent to Rome with the support of the Cardinal. Toward the end of 1567 the Pope ruled in their favor.

When on April 7, 1567 he was elected Superior General, Fr. Alexander Sauli fell completely in the circle of the Cardinal, becoming his intimate friend, counselor, confessor, almost daily consulted for his wisdom and prudence. Almost everyday, for one reason or the other, he had to report to the Cardinal's office, so that the Fathers complained that they had elected a Superior General not the Cardinal's secretary! But the senior Fathers did not mind it at all because this forced the small Congregation to come out of the shell in which had been hiding since the expulsion from Venice: the archbishop was very impartial in calling on all the Fathers according to their activities and talents for specific cases to be resolved.

By now the Archbishop had fallen in love with the Barnabites, due to their holiness and integrity of life. At the end of his pastoral visits he used to go to St. Barnabas to rest, living in the Community with the Fathers, and also washing the dishes (the large stone sink is still kept in the St. Barnabas courtyard).

On September 5, 1568, St. Charles was on retreat in St. Barnabas, and on his own initiative he consecrated the main altar, and gave to the Fathers a precious reliquary.

Only in one occasion St. Charles did not obtain his wish. He wanted to resolve once and for all the chronic poverty of the Congregation, and to save the Order of the Humiliati. They had been founded in 1000, but had completely lost their old discipline, and they were absolutely averse to any kind of reform. The Barnabites would have gained 94 rich houses and 150 new members, while their religious spirit would have finally brought the reform among the Humiliati. But Fr. Sauli was adamant in his refusal because the union would have been an endless source of internal fights, since the Humiliati did not believe at all in the need for reform; they would have been almost twice as many as the Barnabites, therefore uncontrollable; it would have caused the ruin of St. Barnabas good religious spirit. St. Charles tried even an intervention from Rome, but Pius V, well aware of the conditions of the Friars, understood well Fr. Sauli's objections. When the Friar Jerome Donati made the famous attempt to the life of St. Charles, the Pope suppressed the Order once and for all with a decree signed on February 8, 1571, when Fr. Sauli was already in Corsica.

The suppression left many religious houses available, and the Archbishop used his influence so that many of them would go to the Barnabites, who had been so helpful to him in the diocese. First of all, with the consent of Fr. Charles Bascapè, he obtained for them St. James in Cremona. They took possession of it on May 19, 1570. Without the request of the Fathers, St. Charles obtained from Gregory XIII the church of All Saints in Monza, but it was in such a pitiable state that the Fathers asked to have instead Santa Maria al Carrobiolo, which will become the novitiate, and will be the last church to be consecrated by St. Charles on June 14, 1584.

When the Cardinal found out that the Barnabites wanted to open a house in Rome, he recommended them to authorities known to him. He tried also with the Serenissima, the Republic of Venice, to have the band of 1551 against the Barnabites revoked, but without success.

Tasks of trust

St. Charles loved the Barnabites for the simple reason that he experienced their holiness and total dedication to the salvation of souls. The holy Archbishop used the Fathers for the reform of monasteries. They were instrumental for the founding of the monastery of the Capuchin nuns at St. Prassede, where they served as spiritual directors for many years.

Outstanding among them was Fr. Peter Besozzi. In 1567 he was sent on a canonical visit of various religious orders; while Superior in Cremona he was used by bishop Niccolò Sfondrati (future Pope Gregory XIV) to reform various monasteries. Called back to Milan by St. Charles, the monastery of the Angelic Sisters (whose rules had been written by Fr. Charles Bascapè) was entrusted to his care.

As his trust for the Barnabites was growing, the Cardinal entrusted to them two very delicate and important missions.

In the summer of 1580 he sent Fr. Charles Bascapè to the King of Spain, Philip II, because of some tensions between the Archbishop and the Governor of Milan, the Marches Ajamonte. Thanks to Fr. Bascapè skill the mission had excellent results.

In 1583 the Fathers Boerio, Adorno and Grattarola were sent in Valtellina to prevent the spreading of Calvinism. Fr. Boerio, pressed by the heretics, twice had to leave the mission. On May 20, 1584, he went back by order of St. Charles. False accusations were presented against him, but during the public hearing, because of a brilliant self-defense, the judges left secretly to avoid shame. But Fr. Boerio and the parish priest of Poschiavo were thrown in prison anyway, they were maltreated and finally expelled. There was a penalty of 500 scudi for anyone who would offer them hospitality. St. Charles ordered him to stay. The police arrived, the people rebelled, the bells rung, the two priests were set free, but at the end they had to give up.

All of a sudden, during the summer of 1576, a plague exploded in Milan. Many Barnabites became victims of their assistance to the sick, or of the plague itself, among them James Berna (November 15, 1576), considered a saint by St. Charles, and Cornelius Croce (November 16, 1576), 26 years old. The plague caused a halt in the development of the Order. It was because of the encouragement of St. Charles Borromeo that the Barnabites were able to go back to their apostolic activities and to the compilation of their Rules.

The most decisive work accomplished by St. Charles in favor of the Congregation, was the composition of the Constitutions (1579).

Holy friendships

We have already seen how St. Charles entrusted to Fr. Bascapè the diplomatic mission to Madrid. He had received a degree in Canon and Civil Law when he was 26 years old, and he had approached St. Charles to become a cleric. Although not a priest yet, the Cardinal, having an intuition about his value and righteousness, took him along for the canonical visitation in Bergamo, Cremona, and Brescia. He directed him toward canonical and historical studies, and entrusted him with the recognition of relics of various Milanese saints.

When Bascapè entered the Barnabite Order, St. Charles got the promise to avail himself of his expertise for the good of his archdiocese: that is, the study of the Milanese church, and its Ambrosian rite; the revision and composition of books and decrees; the edition of the Synodal Acts, etc. He used him for pastoral visits, and as his personal confessor. Finally it was Fr. Bascapè to close the eyes of the Saint, at 3:00 p.m., on November 4, 1584.

Fr. Bascapè, besides writing St. Charles' life, was his best imitators in his Episcopal activity as bishop of Novara, to the point that he was called "another St. Charles."

The Glorification

When, after the death of St. Charles, his cause of beatification and canonization was introduced, the Barnabites were solicitous to give their support, especially through Fr. Bascapè, by then bishop of Novara. Besides making depositions as a witness, he drafted the 300 questionnaires of the Trial, and in 1605 he was sent to Rome by the Lombard bishops to solicit the cause, which was granted by Pope Paul V on November 1, 1610.

The same year the Barnabites dedicated to St. Charles Borromeo the magnificent church of St. Charles ai Catinari in Rome. The General Chapter of 1614 proclaimed him patron of the Order, prescribing a fast on the vigil, and a solemn celebration of his feast day.

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES (1567-1622)

Francis, the eldest of 13 children, was born in Thorens, Savoy, on August 21, 1567. He received his earliest training, particularly as a gentleman so much required during those times, from his father. At the age of 7 he began school at La Roche. After 2 years he went to Annecy, furthering his education in an institution under the charge of the secular clergy. During this period he received his First Communion and Confirmation on the same day, on December 17, 1577.

In 1582 he left Annecy to study at the University of Paris in the Jesuit college of Clermont. The following 6 years were of prime importance in his formation. Intellectually he became a man of the Renaissance, obtaining a bachelor's degree in arts. He also had time for the study of theology and Scripture.

After his return to Annecy in 1588, his father wished him to follow a career in the service of the State. To acquire the necessary knowledge of law, Francis went to the University of Padua. Here also he found time to study some theology. In 1591 he received his doctorate in both Civil and Canon Law.

His father now suggested that he enter into marriage. His own desire, however, was for the clerical state. As a means of overcoming parental opposition, Louis de Sales, a cousin and a priest, obtained through the Bishop of Geneva, Claude de Granier, an apostolic bull conferring on Francis a position of dignity-provost of the Church of St. Peter in Geneva. He was ordained on December 18, 1593.

The Duke of Savoy in August 1597 suggested to Claude de Granier that Francis de Sales be made his coadjutor. In March 1599 Clement VIII confirmed the choice, but the consecration of the bishop-elect was delayed. In the meantime de Granier died, and 2 months later, on Dec. 8, 1602, Francis was consecrated as his successor to the See of Geneva.

St. Francis comes to know the Barnabites

In April of 1613, bishop Francis de Sales was in Milan to pray on the tomb of St. Charles Borromeo for the health of Countess Frances Fremiot de Chantal, and to put his apostolic ministry under the protection of St. Charles, canonized three years earlier.

Passing by Turin, he stopped to visit Charles Emmanuele I, Duke of Savoy. In the conversation he mentioned to him his desire to entrust to the Jesuits the school in Annecy, but they had declined his offer. The Duke suggested the Barnabites, and sent for Fr. Giusto Guerin, superior of St. Dalmazzo in Turin. Fr. Guerin met the bishop, and then gave him a most joyous welcome in St. Dalmazzo.

St. Francis from Turin went to visit the Barnabites in Vercelli, and on April 25 he was in Milan, guest of Fr. General Ambrogio Mazenta, in St. Barnabas, in the same room so many times used by St. Charles.

Here St. Francis explained to Father General and his Council the situation of the school in Annecy, and the Fathers accepted to take it over.

Annecy

Back in Annecy St. Francis prepared the road for the Barnabites describing them as scholars and holy religious.

Having overcome many difficulties, on July 5, 1614, a contract was signed, and on October 6 of the same year, Fr. Simpliciano Fregoso as superior, and Fr. Giusto Guerin, as treasurer, took over the direction of the school.

St. Francis made sure the Fathers had enough revenues for their community, so he called on Cardinal Maurizio of Savoy, and on the same Charles Emmanuele I, to raise their revenues of 200 Ducati, plus what they were getting from the churches of Silingie and Saint-Claire.

Besides the direction of the school, the archbishop entrusted to the Fathers the teaching of catechism and the solution of moral problems. And when he would leave Annecy he would entrust to the care of the Barnabites his spiritual children and the Sisters of the Visitation.

St. Francis de Sales loved the Barnabites, he participated in all the celebrations of their churches, often preaching and teaching catechism in them. He would often participate in their family celebrations, and preside their literary academics. In other words he never missed an opportunity to express his love and kindness toward them. As a matter of fact he used to say that he was a Barnabite, that is “a son of consolation”; and indeed he could, since on May 7, 1617, he was affiliated to the Order by Fr. General, Domenico Boerio.

Thonon

Again through the intercession of St. Francis de Sales, the Barnabites established themselves in Thonon, in charge of public teaching, and of the school “Holy House,” a center for the spreading of Catholic ideas in an area surrounded by aggressive Protestants.

Since the revenues were few, St. Francis wrote to the Prince Vittorio Amedeo, telling him that if he wanted the Barnabites to be efficient in teaching and in pastoral work, they needed to be helped in any way possible; and he proposed to give them the priory of Contamine-sur-Arve.

On April 6, 1617, St. Francis, in a letter to the General Chapter, stated his desire for the Congregation to expand, and so he proposed to open the novitiate in Rumilly. For various reasons the novitiate was opened instead in Thonon on February 1, 1619.

Barnabite foundations in France

St. Francis' activities in favor of the Barnabites were not limited to his diocese: he used his experience and his many acquaintances to favor the expansion of the Order also in France. Some of the Fathers were already involved in the Bearn (Southern France) by order of Pope Paul V, and of Henry IV; but they did not have their own house as yet.

St. Francis at first opted for a house in Chabeuil, but since the town was too small (4000 people), he proposed Baune. Still it did not work out. Finally, working together with Fr. Redento Baranzano, he was able to open a house in Montargis. Through the help of the Governor of the city, Anthony Des Hayes, intimate friend of St. Francis, the Fathers were able to open a school, like the one in Annecy.

Finally in 1618, while in Paris, St. Francis obtained a royal permit through which the Fathers could open houses in any place in France.

Benevolence towards some of the Fathers

If the whole congregation was the subject of the benevolence of the saint, some of its members were especially dear to him.

In the first place certainly was Fr. Just Guérin.

The affection or better the love binding St. Francis to Fr. Guérin, who was his successor as Bishop of Geneva, was the one characterizing the saints.

When Francis de Sales was notified that Fr. Guérin was in the anteroom of his office, immediately he would run out to hug him and outpour himself with him in expressions of joy causing amazement among the servants. Often in the letters addressed by the saint to Fr. Guérin, we find phrases like: "My Reverend Father, whom I love as my own soul," or "...keep me constantly in your heart as a man perfectly yours, who shall never be if not yours, yours in a special way..." Fr. Guérin is the reason for the special affection and generous prodigality of St. Francis de Sales towards our Order.

He greatly admired Fr. Guérin also for his sincerity and skills in business: towards the end of 1617, for example, he obtained from Fr. General Jerome Boerio to send him to Rome not only for the annexation of benefits to Barnabite houses, but also to ask for information and to aids for the foundation of the seminar as well as the approval of the Rules of the Visitation. And this was not the only time that he gave entrusted to him important tasks.

Other Barnabites loved especially by St. Francis de Sales, were Fr. Simpliciano Fregoso, first rector of the college of Annecy, excellent teacher and a zealous missionary who died in his arms, and Fr. Redento Baranzano, whom he defended with Father General Mazenta, when his *Uranoscopia* (1617) was printed, in which he exposed the Copernican system and the ideas of Galileo.

And we could continue the series, citing Fathers John Baptist de Gennari, William Cramoisy, etc..

After the death

St. Francis de Sales died in Lyons on December 28, 1622. On January 23 the body was transferred to the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Annecy, and then in the one of the Barnabites, where, on February 24, Fr. Amadeo Comotto gave the eulogy.

By request of Monsignor Gian Francesco de Sales, St. Francis' brother, and his successor as bishop of Geneva, and with the permission of the Superiors, Fr. Giusto Guérin, with the help of Fr. Marin, collected all the material needed to introduce the cause of canonization. For this reason he went to Rome to petition Urban VIII for the nomination of an apostolic commission. He worked on it faithfully from 1624 to 1636, when a pontifical decree put on halt all the proceedings for the canonization.

It was resumed in 1647, two years after Fr. Guérin's death, by Fr. Cristoforo Giarda. At the end of 1655 Fr. Eliseo Fusconi presented to Alexander VII, on behalf of Savoy, the petition for Francis de Sales' canonization. He was beatified in 1661, and canonized in 1665.

When in 1877 the proposal was made to declare St. Francis de Sales a Doctor of the Church, among the first letters there was the one of the Superior General of the Barnabites. The cause at the Congregation of Rites was entrusted to another Barnabite, Cardinal Bilio, who presented it under three aspects: as a writer of asceticism, of apologetics, and as a reformer of France. And so, "having heard the report of our venerable brother Aloysius Cardinal Bilio," Pius IX proclaimed St. Francis de Sales Doctor of the Church.

Already in the General Chapter of 1716, Saint Francis had been declared secondary patron of the Congregation, as it had been done for St. Charles.